DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 939 TM 870 606

AUTHOR	Wildemuth, Barbara
TITLE	Coaching for Tests. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation, Princeton, N.J.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Dec 83
CONTRACT	400-83-0015
NOTE	4p.; ERIC/TME Update Series.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ 08541-0001 (free).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Entrance Examinations; Educational Testing; Higher Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Meta Analysis; Secondary Education; *Test Coaching
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *Scholastic Aptitude Test

ABSTRACT

The term "coaching" applies to a variety of types of test preparation programs which vary in length, instructional method, and content. Most research on the effectiveness of coaching has examined the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a measure of academic abilities used to predict college performance. This ERIC Digest reviews studies of coaching for the SAT and addresses the effectiveness of coaching. Of several studies reported between 1950 and 1967, the diversity in the research designs used, the types of coaching programs studied, and sample sizes make it difficult to compare results across studies in a meaningful way. In 1980, Slack and Porter synthesized many earlier studies on coaching, concluding that training can effectively help students raise their SAT scores. In 1978-1979, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) studied the effect of commercial coaching on SAT scores. A 1981 synthesis of coaching studies by Messick and Jungeblut included most of the studies in Slack and Porter's report, plus the FTC results. The most recent synthesis included all those studies cited by Slack and Porter, and Messick and Jungeblut. It is concluded that the data support a positive effect of coaching, but the size of the effect estimated from the matched or randomized studies (10 points) seems too small to be practically important. Sixteen bibliographic citations are included. (LMO)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED286939

ERIC DIGESTS

COACHING FOR TESTS

ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement,
and Evaluation, Educational Testing Service,
Princeton, New Jersey

December 1983

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

TM 870 606

COACHING FOR TESTS

DEFINITIONS OF COACHING

The term "coaching" has been applied to a variety of types of test preparation programs, varying in length, instructional method and content.

EFFECTIVENESS OF COACHING

The vast majority of research on the effectiveness of coaching has been oriented toward the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a measure of academic abilities used toward the end of secondary school as a predictor of academic performance in college (6).

Several studies of coaching for the SAT were reported between 1950 and 1967 (2, 7, and 12). The results reported cite score improvements of 0 to 81 points. None attempted to replicate the research methods of the earlier studies. The diversity in the research designs used, the types of coaching programs studied, and sample sizes make it "difficult to compare results across these several studies in a meaningful way" (7, p.202).

In 1980, Slack and Porter synthesized many of the earlier studies on coaching. They concluded that "training for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) can effectively help students raise their scores" (12, p. 154). In response, Jackson noted that some of the studies used by Slack and Porter were "intensive educational programs lasting the better part of a full school year" (4, p. 387). When these studies are not included, the effects of coaching appear to be smaller, in the range of 0 to 47 points.

In 1978-1979, the effect of commercial coaching on SAT scores was studied by the Federal Trade Commission. SAT scores from the students of two coaching schools were analyzed. It was concluded that coaching at one school was effective in raising scores, "contributing on the average approximately 25 points to students' scores" (3). However, the FTC itself admits that the results of this study are somewhat ambiguous, because of its non-experimental design.

A 1981 synthesis of coaching studies (7) included most of the studies included in Slack and Porter's report (12) plus the FTC results. This synthesis noted that the size of the score effects was related to the amount of student contact time during the coaching program. The relationship was nonlinear, however, with the larger amounts of score increase associated with dramatically larger amounts of contact time.

The most recent synthesis of studies on coaching (2) included all those cited by Slack and Porter (12) and by Messick and Jungeblut (7). This synthesis tried to take into account some of the variation in the results caused by research design problems. The results indicated that studies comparing score gains to national norms yielded score increases four times greater than the increases estimated from matched or randomized evaluations. In addition, the matched or randomized study results were more consistent. The authors concluded that "the data do support a positive effect of coaching on SAT scores, but that the size of the coaching effect estimated from the matched or randomized studies (10 points) seems too small to be practically important" (2, p.1).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TESTING PRACTICE

The question of whether coaching is effective is an important one, and has been addressed by the studies described above. Why some coaching programs are effective is even more important, because the answer has significant implications for the use and interpretation of tests. Is it because the student's test-taking skills have improved, because the student's test anxiety has decreased, or because the student has gained knowledge in the areas measured by the test? Hopefully, the research of the future will shed more light on these issues.

REFERENCES

1. Coffman, W. E. The Scholastic Aptitude Test: An historical perspective. College Board Review, 1980, 117, A8-A11. (ERIC No. EJ 234 527).
2. DerSimonian, R., & Laird, N. M. Evaluating the effect of coaching on SAT scores: A meta-analysis. Harvard Educational Review, 1983, 53(1), 1-15. (ERIC No. EJ 275 753).

TM 870 609

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON TESTS, MEASUREMENT, AND EVALUATION
EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE, PRINCETON, NJ 08541-0001 (609) 734-5181

ERIC®
TESTS MEASUREMENT EVALUATION

3. Effects of Coaching on Standardized admission examination. Revised statistical analysis of data gathered by Boston Regional Office of the Federal Trade Commission. Washington, D.C.: Federal Trade Commission, Bureau of Consumer Protection, 1979. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 174 645).
4. Jackson, R. The Scholastic Aptitude Test: A response to Slack and Porter's "Critical Appraisal." Harvard Educational Review, 1980, 50(3), 382-91. (ERIC No. EJ 233 645).
5. Messick, S. The controversy over coaching: Issues of effectiveness and equity. New Directions for Testing and Measurement, 1981, 11, 21-53. (ERIC No. EJ 254 500).
6. Messick, S. The effectiveness of coaching for the SAT: Review and reanalysis of research from the fifties to the FTC. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1980.
7. Messick, S., & Jungeblut, A. Time and method in coaching for the SAT. Psychological Bulletin, 1981, 89, 191-216. (ERIC No. EJ 254 150).
8. Pike, L. W. Short-term instruction, test wiseness, and the Scholastic Aptitude Test. A literature review with research recommendations. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1979. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 204 347).
9. Powers, D. E. Estimating the effects of various methods of preparing for the SAT. New York: College Entrance Examination Board; Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1982. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 223 677).
10. Powers, D. E. Students' uses of and reactions to alternative methods of preparing for the SAT. Measurement and Evaluation in Guidance, 1981, 14(3), 118-26. (ERIC No. EJ 250 921).
11. Sesnowitz, M., Bernhardt, K. L., & Knain, D. M. An analysis of the impact of commercial test preparation courses on SAT scores. American Educational Research Journal, 1982, 19(3), 429-41. (ERIC No. EJ 275 517).
12. Slack, W. V., & Porter, D. The Scholastic Aptitude Test: A critical appraisal. Harvard Educational Review, 1980, 50(2), 154-75. (ERIC No. EJ 227 121).
13. Slack, W. V., & Porter, D. Training, validity, and the issue of aptitude: A reply to Jackson. Harvard Educational Review, 1980, 50(3), 392-401. (ERIC No. EJ 233 646).
14. Staff report on the Federal Trade Commission investigation of coaching for standardized admission tests. Boston: Federal Trade Commission, 1981. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 204 391).
15. Swinton, S. S., & Powers, D. E. A study of the effects of special preparation on GRE analytical scores and item types. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1983, 75(1), 104-15. (ERIC No. EJ 278 879).
16. Testing for college admissions: Trends and issues. Arlington, Va.: Educational Research Service, 1981. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 206 697).

BW 12/83

The National Institute of Education

This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education under contract no. NIE-400-83-0015. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.